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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 4 October 1993, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. BADRAN

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General debate on the subject: "Protection of children against economic exploitation"

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE ON THE SUBJECT: "PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AGAINST ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION" (agenda item 11)

1. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed representatives from the specialized agencies of the United Nations and from the non-governmental organizations who had come to take part in the debate on the economic exploitation of children. She invited Mrs. Santos Pais to introduce the subject.

2. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS said that the economic exploitation of children revealed their vulnerability, the holistic nature of their rights and the urgency of ensuring that those rights were respected. It was also necessary for Governments, United Nations bodies and other bodies concerned with the rights of the child to agree, as the World Conference on Human Rights had recommended, on "a comprehensive rational approach" aimed at putting an end to that exploitation.

3. Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child did not define the expression "economic exploitation". "Economic" implied that profit was being derived from the production, distribution and consumption of goods or services, and "exploitation" meant that an unjust profit was being derived from the work of others. The economic exploitation of children could take various forms, such as forced labour, child pornography and the use of children for criminal purposes, as in the case of drug trafficking. The child could even be reduced to the status of merchandise where he or she was sold or prostituted. On the other hand, a child's labour could be licit if performed with regard for the relevant international instruments; thus ILO Convention No. 138 allowed children to perform light work from the age of 13. Very often, families found themselves in such penury that they encouraged their children to work. However, most of the time those children engaged in illicit and clandestine activities and were increasingly marginalized.

4. One could not wait for poverty to be eliminated before turning one's attention to the children. They should instead be placed at the centre of a development strategy; their dignity and individuality should be respected; steps should be taken to ensure that their rights were respected; and destitution, discrimination and vulnerability should be replaced by solidarity, participation and equity. If the economic exploitation of children was to be eliminated, it was necessary at the outset to understand the extent of the problem; that was no easy task in view of the fact that the majority of exploited children were involved in illicit activities. Statistics and indicators were lacking. It was also necessary to inform children and their families of their rights and of the risks they were running in engaging in certain activities. Information was an essential tool in prevention. There was also a need to establish an effective system of protection, specifically by adopting legislation under which a child engaging in an illegal activity would be considered, not a delinquent, but a victim, by creating a system of free and compulsory education which encouraged the development of a child's abilities, and by establishing bodies entrusted with the task of protecting and assisting the child. Finally, consideration should be given to the establishment of a system that would permit the social reintegration of exploited children.

5. In conclusion, she expressed the hope that the discussion that was about to commence would be of help in eradicating the economic exploitation of children.

6. Mr. HAMMARBERG said that the reports of States parties that had been studied by the Committee showed that the economic exploitation of children was a subject of major concern in both rich and poor countries. It took various forms, such as hazardous labour, prostitution, slavery and even the sale of children for adoption. The main cause of all those evils was poverty.

7. Some years ago, UNICEF had argued in favour of structural adjustment with a human face. The health and education of children should not be sacrificed on the altar of economic recovery. Many States had been struck head-on by recession. One example was Costa Rica, where the crisis of the early 1980s had had serious consequences: a widening of the social gaps and regional imbalances, changes in the organization of the family, particularly among the weaker groups due to the need for more family members to seek employment, a reduction in State financing of major social programmes, and the difficulty of adapting public institutions to meet the new demands of the poorest groups (see para. 4 of the report of Costa Rica, CRC/C/3/Add.8). Countries such as Viet Nam, the Russian Federation and Sweden had experienced similar problems. It was disadvantaged children who were the first to be affected by economic crisis.

8. At the World Summit for Children, held in New York three years before, political leaders had stated that structural adjustments should be carried out "while ensuring the well-being of the most vulnerable sectors of the populations, in particular the children". That pledge had not been honoured. In article 4 of the Convention, however, the States parties undertook to protect the economic, social and cultural rights of the child "to the maximum extent of their available resources". What State would dare to claim that it had fully lived up to that obligation? He stressed that States parties had an obligation to respect the rights of the child, and that children should not be the last to be served because they did not have the means to make their voices heard.

9. The situation of children had further deteriorated by virtue of the fact that donor countries had reduced their international assistance. Furthermore, when national budgets were being drawn up, children were seen as a "cost" and not as an investment for the future. In order to change that situation, the international financial institutions, the development agencies and all Governments should review their policies in the light of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

10. Mrs. BELEMBAOGO, referring to the social aspects of the economic exploitation of children, said that the phenomenon was becoming more widespread in the majority of countries, whether developed or developing. Consideration should be given to ways of preventing it so that children could thrive and develop normally. Children should also be prepared for taking on the responsibilities of adulthood and citizenship. That was why parents initiated children in a number of activities within the family. At a certain point children became an integral part of the family labour force and a source of income for the family.

11. Factors such as extreme poverty, the divorce or death of parents, imprisonment of the father and the exodus from rural areas explained the early integration of the child into the world of work, particularly in the non-formal sector. By working, the child ensured his or her survival and that of the family, but rarely his or her future. It would be interesting to learn whether child workers succeeded one day in making a home and leading a normal life. Such children lacked social security cover and did not attend school. Their working conditions often placed their lives in danger. For example, the sex industry was using younger and younger children in order to protect clients from the risk of being infected with AIDS. Children doing domestic work were very poorly protected by labour legislation. Employers rarely declared them, and girls were frequent victims of sexual abuse. Girls were often not even remunerated because the work they did was regarded as preparation for a future role as dutiful spouse and housewife. In some countries the persistence of certain customs such as the abandonment and banishing of girls who became pregnant before marriage forced them into prostitution.

12. The situation became even more worrying as social morals deteriorated; the extended family was breaking up and individualism was taking precedence over family and national solidarity. In such conditions children increasingly turned away from marriage and no longer had any confidence in the future. In most developing countries the population explosion made it difficult to implement development programmes and to enforce laws for the protection of children, where such laws existed. Although they contributed to their country's economic growth, children, especially those who belonged to minority or disadvantaged groups, did not always benefit from the spin-offs of development. She emphasized, in conclusion, that any development policy should take account of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO Conventions on child labour.

13. Mrs. FANELLI (ATD Fourth World) said that she wished to comment on the problem of children in situations of extreme poverty. Her organization, which had been founded by Father Joseph Wresinski, had been working for the past 36 years in almost all regions of the world with the help of volunteers and corresponding members who gave assistance to children and families who were destitute.

14. She drew attention to the preamble of the Convention, in which States parties recognized that, in all countries in the world, there were children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, and that such children needed special consideration. Violations of the rights of those children should be denounced if those rights were to be safeguarded. UNICEF had submitted a resolution whose declared aim was to reach the poorest.

15. Abandoned children and their families usually suffered from the same distress and the same sense of solitude. Such children, whom ATD Fourth World refused to call "street children", never stopped talking about their families, even if they had left them 10 years before, and they suffered as much as the destitute families which the children had left or in which they had been placed, or from which they had been stolen. Children and families in extreme poverty felt responsible and culpable for the situation in which they found themselves. Obliged to accept jobs which were looked down upon by those who

could do better, such children, so that they might survive, were deprived of schooling and of a better future, and were exposed to violence. They were proud of helping their family, but experienced humiliation.

16. It was not possible, in her view, to consider child labour separately from family income, problems related to housing, education and health and the right of expression, participation and representation of impoverished families and children. Extreme poverty had been the subject of a study by the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, and of resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and the Vienna conference.

17. A report by Father Joseph Wresinski on the subject, noted that extreme poverty was a violation of the rights of the human person. On 17 October 1987 Father Wresinski had inaugurated a flagstone in honour of the victims of poverty on the Human Rights Esplanade in Paris. The inscription on it read: "Where men are condemned to live in poverty, human rights are violated. Joining together to see that those rights are respected is a sacred duty." The United Nations had decided that that date would be a World Day for the Elimination of Poverty, and the Director-General of the Centre for Human Rights had taken the occasion to invite Swiss and French families living in great poverty to bear witness to the poverty which prevailed throughout the world. Also among those invited were Tapori - a pejorative term denoting children who were very poor.

18. Mr. PICARD (International Labour Organisation) said that in the matter of protection against economic exploitation it was advisable to take as a basis article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in which States parties recognized the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation. However, except in the case of extreme situations such as slavery, debt servitude and the sale of children, it was difficult to give the concept a universal meaning and to determine what were the obligations of States parties to the Convention in that regard.

19. For ILO, the international labour standards constituted a criterion for determining what should be protected under article 32 of the Convention. Through its instruments and its activity in the field, sometimes in close cooperation with NGOs, ILO was seeking to eliminate child labour, and in that endeavour placed itself in the tradition of those who had been fighting since the nineteenth century to enable children to become citizens and producers. Its efforts had been crowned with success, especially in the structured sector, but even so there was no reason to give up the struggle.

20. He outlined the provisions of ILO Convention No. 138 on the minimum age at which children could gain access to employment. That instrument obliged States parties to pursue a national policy aimed at securing the effective abolition of child labour and progressively raising the minimum age of admission to employment or work to a level that would enable adolescents to achieve their fullest physical and mental development.

21. Child labour should be considered from a dynamic perspective, that of children's participation in society, which should not end when they became adult. Children aged between 10 and 14 who were currently working could well

be the unemployed of tomorrow. That correlation should be studied by measuring the consequences of the lack of those skills, possession of which would enable them to change their trade or job. He reminded the Committee that children often held "filling-in" jobs or marginal jobs which were condemned to disappear. They did not learn trades which would offer them prospects for the future. For example, the development of productivity in agriculture depended on an improvement in the skills base, and that could be obtained only by improving the general level of training of agricultural workers.

22. The question of child labour prompted questions about the future of society: should the present situation be perpetrated, what path of development should be chosen, and what about equality of opportunity? Even if legislation could not end the economic exploitation of children, it nevertheless had a vital role to play in defining what was lawful and what was not, and what was good or bad for society. The protection of child workers should be the same as the protection of other wage-earners. The question of child workers who were under the minimum age was more complex, and governments, employers, workers and NGOs should draw up protection measures with the aim of abolishing such work, specifically by fixing a minimum age for access to employment, organizing the working conditions of children and adolescents and devising penalties and other appropriate sanctions.

23. He drew attention to a general policy document concerning the implications for technical cooperation of ILO policy on the abolition of child labour. Other measures depended to a large extent on the determination of States to improve and strengthen education and training systems, and to establish or reactivate social services, as well as all the measures to promote employment and income distribution without which the fight against poverty would remain mere wishful thinking. It was for society to harness its efforts to implement such a policy, and not to resign itself to doing nothing.

24. Mr. BASTA (Director, UNICEF Office for Europe in Geneva) said that according to ILO more than 100 million children under the age of 15 throughout the world were working as the twentieth century was drawing to a close. In fact, the number of child workers was even increasing in certain sectors, and the majority of them were working in conditions which were damaging their physical and mental health.

25. The expression "child labour" encompassed a complex reality embracing tasks that ranged from the most benign to the most harmful. Many child workers were de facto if not de jure forced into servitude to repay debts incurred by their parents, or were compelled to perform dangerous tasks by their parents, who were unaware of the risks to which they were exposing their children. In recent years, two major international instruments and resolutions had addressed the problem by taking steps to protect working children, to promote developmental services and to abolish illegal child labour.

26. He recalled that the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been adopted in 1989 by the General Assembly of the United Nations and ratified by 164 countries, and also that the World Summit for Children held in New York in 1990 had adopted the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and

Development of Children. Articles 32, 34 and 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognized the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from all forms of sexual exploitation and the right of the child to education. He also drew attention to the Colombo Resolution adopted in 1992 by the countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, which recognized the importance of child education and resolved to eliminate child labour progressively in the South Asia region.

27. The existing legislation was unfortunately insufficient to protect children against economic exploitation. A more precise definition of what constituted exploitation of child labour should make it easier to improve protection against it. Children often worked in order to ensure their families' survival and were not therefore in a position to pursue their schooling, which in any event was not adapted to their needs. He listed the various kinds of activities in which children were engaged, and mentioned in particular the sexual exploitation of children, which was becoming increasingly common in the countries of the former communist bloc. He also denounced the hypocrisy of certain societies which condemned the sexual harassment of women while practising the sexual exploitation of children. On the other hand, he praised the achievements of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and Escuela Nueva in Colombia in providing education for children in rural areas, and he encouraged all Governments to strengthen their national plans of action and draw up education programmes that were adapted to the needs of the specific groups of children who worked.

28. He also welcomed the cooperation between UNICEF and ILO in implementing various recommendations made by international and non-governmental organizations in the area of child labour. Those recommendations included the following 15 points: reiteration by all States parties of their commitment to the elimination of the exploitation of child labour; review of legislation on the employment of children (including agriculture and domestic service); undertaking comprehensive national studies on the situation regarding child labour; creation of national commissions on child labour charged with drawing up country-specific measures to protect the child at work and to eliminate child labour; launching public information campaigns on the hazards faced by working children; special information efforts aimed at the community and family; community participation in child labour-related programmes; provision of a system of free, compulsory and flexibly timed primary education to permit participation of working children; the establishment of poverty alleviation programmes; national studies on child prostitution; establishment of programmes for children who were victims of sexual exploitation; information campaigns and social mobilization against child pornography and the sexual exploitation of children; enactment of legislation to halt child pornography; increased penalties for the sexual exploitation of children; and concerted efforts between governments to end the sexual exploitation of children, including the right to prosecute those responsible for sexual exploitation of a child in another country. In conclusion, he quoted the words of a Zürich schoolboy: "A child who works has no chance or choice in life".

29. Ms. ROBERTS (Anti-Slavery International) said that the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child had just published a brochure on elimination of the exploitation of child labour that was designed to make the general public more aware of the specific problems of working children and to

show that action undertaken at the local level served to encourage action programmes at the national and international levels. She hoped that the brochure would be used in campaigns on behalf of children. Broader awareness of the dangers inherent in child labour was essential both at the national and at the international level. Existing legislation in that area was useful, but had a very limited effect on child labour and often served to conceal the reality. Illegal child labour was difficult to identify in specific terms. Minimum rules should be drawn up as part of the strategy to combat child labour and in terms specifically of hours, wages and access to health care and education. Once those measures had been taken it would be easier to eliminate such practices as slavery, hazardous work, etc. She deplored the fact that international trade encouraged the development of child labour, which represented an inexpensive workforce. Two campaigns currently being undertaken with the participation of NGOs in Asia, Europe and North America were aimed at eliminating child prostitution and child labour in the hand-woven carpet sector. Despite having encountered numerous difficulties, the campaigns had enabled the mass media and society to become more familiar with those problems. It was her hope that the campaigns would be supported by even more NGOs.

30. Mr. PRADHAN (Child Workers in Nepal) began by giving a detailed account of the exploitation of child labour in his country. He said Nepalese society was governed by an unjust socio-economic structure. Poverty, economic crisis, illiteracy and ignorance were making the miserable living conditions of the population, and in particular of the children, even worse. Children were often deprived of the bare minimum in terms of food, shelter, clothing and health care, and, furthermore, they were exploited. According to a study undertaken by his organization, 5.7 million children were working in Nepal in more than 65 different sectors of the economy. In a traditional and conservative society, where the social caste system still operated, children worked and helped their parents in plantations, workshops and domestic service, regardless of the fact that child labour was considered to be illegal, and even a social crime. Slavery had been abolished in Nepal 126 years ago, but children were still under servitude in agriculture, the tea plantations, etc. The "Kamaiya Pratha" was a glaring example of the servitude of thousands of children. He noted that child labour in Nepal was not only a traditional phenomenon but also a modern reality; in that connection he mentioned child labour in the carpet factories, which accounted for 58 per cent of Nepal's foreign trade.

31. In that context, ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child had given momentum to the movement for the protection and promotion of those rights, even though the economic exploitation of children continued. All the efforts aimed at protecting children against exploitation could not obscure the reality, which was deeply rooted in Nepalese society. He recommended that measures be taken at the government level and applied by NGOs empowered to work for children's rights and social development and he proposed a number of specific measures designed to reduce the degree of exploitation of children: banning child labour in plantations and factories; setting up a system of compulsory primary education; drawing up programmes for the supervision of dangerous work; and banning work by children under the age of 10. He also recommended a number of measures to increase public awareness of the seriousness of the problem: campaigns on behalf of children; the

introduction of children's rights as a subject in the school curriculum; and increasing the number of girls who attended school. Laws should also be adopted to ban all forms of slavery and servitude. Programmes to help the most disadvantaged groups in the population should be set in place so that children no longer had to work. Finally, he informed the Committee of the publication of a new book entitled Child Labour in Nepal, which described the practical steps taken in Nepal to eliminate child labour.

32. Mr. GUSSIANOVICH (Rädda Barnen) drew attention to the setting up of several organizations of child workers in Latin America. That development was still in its early stages, but it reflected a desire to transform the phenomenon of child workers into a social movement. All those organizations had decided to fight against the exploitation of child workers. However, they recognized that children could build dignified lives for themselves even when they had to work.

33. Child labour was increasing rapidly and was accompanied by a deterioration in children's working conditions. What was new was that the phenomenon no longer affected only children from the poorest classes of society, but also those from the impoverished middle classes. According to estimates, by the year 2000 the population of Latin America would have increased by 190 million, so it was necessary to make very rapid changes in the economic order prevailing in the region.

34. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was an instrument of very considerable moral and ethical force, but its juridical effectiveness was less certain. Furthermore, the Convention had nothing new to contribute compared with the existing international regulations in terms of meeting the expectations of the child worker social movements. Furthermore, the Convention did not come out explicitly in favour of the abolition of child labour. It was not uncommon in the industrialized countries where the exploitation of child labour had long been abolished for it to be stated that it was ethically impossible to accept child labour but that, because of poverty, child labour could be legitimate in certain developing countries. That statement had little regard for the fact that the industrialized countries were in part responsible for the poverty of the developing countries.

35. It was clearly necessary to combat the exploitation of child labour but work experience was nevertheless of undoubted value in creating a social and political identity. Several questions with regard to child labour remained open. Above all, certain concepts had to be defined more precisely - concepts such as "street children", "economic exploitation", "children at risk" and "children performing marginal economic activities". At the national level, it was essential to adopt legislation that was in conformity with the spirit of the Convention, but at the same time to go beyond the Convention's ambiguities and limitations. It was also essential to institutionalize the participation of child workers as economic and social agents; in fact, it was time to move from imposing social control over children to ascribing a social role to them.

36. Ms. VORA (Habitat International Coalition) said that the growing number of working children in India was a cause for great concern as all their basic rights continued to be violated. According to estimates, 11 million children

were working in India in 1985. While poverty and adult unemployment were the primary causes of child labour, it was also important to analyse the development models of the countries where the children worked. Furthermore, recent phenomena had led to a deterioration in the situation of children: the adoption of structural adjustment programmes oriented towards securing economic growth through exports and substituting local products for imports; closing enterprises, which had accelerated adult unemployment and propelled large numbers of children on to the labour market; the increasing informalization of the economy; the promotion of tourism which caused an increase in child prostitution; environmental degradation and large development projects which had substantial implications for the lifestyles of millions of people, especially indigenous groups; large-scale political and social tensions caused by economic change that had permitted the emergence of fundamentalist forces; and finally the discrimination to which certain groups had been subjected for centuries due to social practices such as the caste system. In those circumstances, girl children, street children and children in servitude called for particular attention.

37. The Government of India had long been indifferent to the situation of child workers. Non-governmental organizations had had discussions which had led to the identification of areas in which it was necessary to work in order to eliminate child labour: information aimed at convincing public opinion of the need to fight against child labour; identification and registration of groups of child workers; identification of patterns of migration among child workers; establishment of rehabilitation centres for child workers; development of programmes designed to meet their needs in terms of shelter and health; formation of bodies composed of citizens at the local, national and regional levels to detect violations of children's rights and to monitor efforts to eradicate child labour; help for the parents of child workers so that they could organize themselves and demand that programmes be implemented to provide them with employment or credit facilities. Furthermore, primary education should be compulsory and free of charge; the necessary legislative measures should be adopted immediately on issues such as the age of child workers; pressure should be exerted on the Government to come up with a comprehensive plan of action towards eliminating child labour and towards implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

38. It was also imperative to go beyond the conventional indicators and to define more comprehensive ones that would counter the impact of development policies on children. The first task of Governments was to recognize that children had basic rights to health, housing and education.

39. Ms. DIOP (Anti-Slavery Society) referred to the problem of children in many West African countries who were sent into the towns to work as domestic servants. The problem generally concerned girls between the ages of 8 and 15 who had not received any schooling, but sometimes it involved girls as young as six. They worked long hours and, because of their youth, they were subject to all kinds of abuse, including confiscation of their pay by adults, maltreatment by their masters and sexual abuse which led to pregnancies and serious consequences when they returned to their villages. According to her research, between 18 and 70 per cent of families - depending on the region - were affected by the phenomenon.

40. Children were placed by their parents or guardians with people for whom they performed domestic work or sometimes paid activities. It also happened, although less frequently than before, that they were not remunerated at all; when they were, their pay was very often confiscated by the person responsible for their upbringing. A new variant of the phenomenon had emerged: a "professional placer" who provided his services for a commission. That new, mercantile method of placing children in work was becoming transnational in its scope. It was no longer merely a matter of responding to the demand of the local market, but of going in search of external markets. The phenomenon was therefore taking a turn in the direction of slavery. There were the cases of Ghanaian women sent to Côte d'Ivoire to engage in prostitution or to perform domestic work, and of women from Benin sent to Nigeria and other neighbouring countries.

41. In the present context of frequent socio-cultural, political, economic and demographic change, it was essential to take action on behalf of those children. There was a need to draw up a number of recommendations for research and action. The problem was still insufficiently understood and partly concealed by the networks of traditional social relations, kinship, ethnic groups, etc. Any action should be planned both at local and interregional levels.

42. At the local and national levels the Committee on the Rights of the Child should encourage Governments to recognize the existence of a phenomenon which they knew nothing of or even denied in the majority of cases. It was a matter of guaranteeing children their full dignity. She also recommended that the Committee urge Governments to establish standards for the working conditions of children. A minimum age should be set, working hours should be regulated, with a guaranteed right to days off, and efforts should be made to ensure that children received a more just remuneration and one of which they themselves would be the prime beneficiaries.

43. Activities should be developed which contributed to the full moral, physical, psychological and cultural development of children by guaranteeing them access to literacy and to practical skills training which could lead to income-producing areas of employment, guaranteeing access to primary health care to remedy the health problems that were often caused by their working conditions, making it easier for them to gain access to recreational and sporting activities in an emotionally secure environment, and making national public opinion in various countries more aware of the problem instead of, as at present, being the first to establish and accept the status quo. Making public opinion more appreciative of the problem and mobilizing it to do something should enable all communities to play a part in the various prevention and readaptation projects on behalf of children working as domestic servants. The mass media should play an informational-instructional role in that context. Local micro-projects should be carried out both in the towns where the child domestic workers were employed and in their home villages.

44. Finally, she recommended that the Committee encourage the establishment of interregional networks in the countries concerned and help in setting them up, with a view to drawing up a common general programme whose aim would be to exchange experience gained by individual countries. The programme should

comprise a research element in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon at the regional and even continent-wide level, and to contribute to developing more suitable prevention and readjustment policies.

45. Mr. BELSEY (World Health Organization) provided information on the risks to which child workers were exposed. The risk of dying from work-related injuries was four or five times greater for children between the ages of 10 and 14 than for those between the ages of 15 and 19. According to some studies that had been carried out, the rate of hospitalization for child workers was six times greater than for other children. They were exposed to more risks than adults because they were developing physically and mentally. They were using tools that were designed for adults, and became tired more easily, therefore putting themselves at greater risk of being injured or dying. They had smaller lungs than adults and breathed more rapidly, so they were exposed to higher concentrations of toxic substances present in the air and consequently were more likely to suffer permanent damage, chronic lung disease and premature death. When they were undernourished and anaemic, the risks were even greater. By making children work who were too young to do so, society and families were consuming their own human capital. He therefore had five recommendations to make:

46. Firstly, it was essential to improve the lives and safety of working children by giving them access to primary health care.

47. Secondly, measures should be promoted to prohibit the employment of children in manifestly hazardous work, because of the adverse effects on their health, safety and morals. The most vulnerable and youngest children should be withdrawn from the workplace. Where they had to work, they should be guaranteed working conditions which did not compromise their safety and health.

48. Thirdly, the medical sector had a role to play in improving the situation of child workers through both research and direct action. Each country should identify the nature and extent of the risks run by child workers. References to the work activities of children should be included in their medical records. Epidemiological and clinical findings regarding the health dangers of child labour should be publicized in order to increase national awareness and prompt community action. Government agencies, NGOs and communities could be mobilized to enforce laws prohibiting child labour, especially in areas where children were exposed to high levels of risk, and to improve their living and working conditions through medical, nutritional, educational and social support programmes.

49. Fourthly, there should be specific programmes to counteract the acute and long-term effects of poor working conditions on children. Such programmes needed to address education, the acquisition of basic skills and the provision of counselling. Staff in hospitals, clinics and dispensaries should keep special records on the health status of child workers. Also, a plan for disseminating information through the mass media and the scientific community needed to be put in place.

50. Fifthly, it was the responsibility of Governments to ensure the protection of child workers and the observance of international and national standards on the rights and welfare of children. Scarcity of resources was often used as an excuse, even when existing capacity for enforcing standards was under-utilized. The fundamental problem was a lack of political will. In order to work towards the abolition of child labour, countries needed to consider children as a long-term investment and as a valuable human and economic resource.

51. Mr. RETUREAU (World Federation of Trade Unions) supported the recommendations made by the representatives of WHO and ILO. He said the Committee should interpret article 32 of the Convention in the light of the existing conventions and recommendations of the United Nations and the specialized agencies dealing with labour, human rights and health.

52. There was a general acceptance that children could perform certain tasks within the family, especially in rural areas, on condition that those tasks were adapted to their age and did not interfere with their schooling. It was also quite acceptable for children to participate in production work as part of their professional training. However, the tasks required of them were generally of a repetitive and marginal nature, and had no training content. While their manual skills were exploited and they were exposed to health hazards and their physical and intellectual development was impaired, they did not acquire any training that would enable them later to do anything other than marginal or unskilled work. Not only was their childhood stolen from them, but they were thereby deprived of a future as well.

53. Although they were wretchedly low, their wages were often vitally important to the survival of their families. So one could not blame the children or their parents for a situation that was forced on them. It was the responsibility of the States concerned to promote education, and the right to education, and to ensure social protection. The international institutions must take care to see that the social dimension was taken into account in economic reforms. Prominent among the social provisions which the World Federation of Trade Unions wished to see included in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade were standards relating to child labour.

54. India was the only country which had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child to recognize that under-development did not permit it to implement fully article 32 other than in a step-by-step manner. The other countries had preferred to ignore the problem of economic exploitation of children, which was not unique to the developing countries and affected virtually the entire world.

55. The fact that in recent years the economic exploitation of children had appeared to become worse should be chief among the concerns of the Committee, which must urge Governments to make the development of education and the elimination of the economic exploitation of children a national priority. The Committee should also urge them to support NGOs working to promote the rights of the child.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.